General Description of the Lands

The PRA has a total of 264,481 acres of public land administered by BLM. This scattered land pattern maintains some high public values, but due to the isolated nature, management is extremely difficult. The land uses on the public land are as varied as the resources it contains. Public lands provide areas for livestock grazing, wildlife habitat, recreational uses (ORV, camping, hunting, fishing, skiing, etc.), access roads, and other uses.

Land ownership patterns in the PRA have been dictated primarily by the topography. Originally, the majority of privately owned lands in the PRA were obtained through agricultural entries such as the Homestead Act, Stock Raising Homestead Act, Desert Land Entries, Cash Entry, Timber Culture Act, public sales, and through mineral entry patents.

There is a total of 59,160 acres of public land under some form of withdrawal or classification. This includes 2,422 acres under a "Special Action" and a "Determination" to protect wildlife habitat for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Withdrawals include power site reserves, power projects, public water reserves, administrative sites (U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service), recreation/camp sites, stock driveway and one wildlife reserve. Other types of withdrawals or de facto withdrawals include land use classifications for recreation and public purposes. These withdrawn lands receive varying degrees of management, depending on the land uses and type of withdrawal.

Land Use Authorizations

Land use authorizations are issued for a variety of purposes, some short-term and others long-term. Short-term uses include agricultural leases, National Guard training areas, and other uses involving minimal land improvements. Long-term uses include rights-of-way for powerlines, highways, roads, pipelines, telephone lines, communication sites, electric power generation sites, and mineral material (sand and gravel) sites.

Major right-of-way corridors exist in the PRA. These corridors are areas that already have significant development for a particular use, such as electric power transmission lines, interstate highways, State highways, and railroads. It is recommended that BLM utilize utility avoidance "windows" rather than utility corridors to better accommodate rights-of-way in the future.

Known Land Exchange, Sale, or Land Acquisition Proposals

Exchange

Exchange of public land occur when parcels meet the criteria under Section 206 of FLPMA. Exchange of public land identified in retention areas would be subject to the plan amendment process.

Sale

Sales of public land occur when parcels meet the disposal criteria in Section 203 of the FLPMA. Most of these parcels are small, isolated, and unmanageable.

Isolated tracts are those parcels of public land that are surrounded by private lands, or are cut off from larger parcels of public land because of manmade improvements (roads, fences, canals, etc.) or natural features (rivers, canyons, etc.). In some cases, they may be an appendage of a larger block of public land that extends linearly into private land. These tracts may vary in size from less than one acre to several hundred acres.

Many parcels have no physical or legal public access. Others may have physical access but restricted legal access or vice versa. Because of this and their size, they do not receive as much management attention as more accessible tracts. As a result, unauthorized use of these isolated parcels is common. They are often an obstacle for the surrounding private landowner(s), who have to work around the frequently undefined property boundaries of these parcels. These are the types of parcels that the public expresses the greatest amount of interest in acquiring.

Some isolated parcels would often enhance a private land operation when, under private ownership, they could be put to their highest and best use. Other isolated parcels offer significant public values or resources such as riparian or wildlife habitat, cultural resource values, or watershed protection that require them to remain in public ownership.

Acquisition

Acquisition of private land is authorized under Section 205 of the FLPMA. This is accomplished primarily through land exchanges with private landowners and the State of Idaho. Acquisition of private or State land is considered only for those lands that are within the retention areas and would meet the public interest criteria in the FLPMA.

Agricultural

The majority of the private land holdings in the PRA are used for livestock operations and agricultural production. These uses involve minimal demands on public land and consist of use authorizations for agricultural facilities, access roads, and utilities.

Additional agricultural land could be developed by providing public land through sales or exchange already under agricultural use (in trespass), or through sales or exchanges on unimproved or unoccupied public land. However, these disposals would only be considered on lands located within transfer categories.

Land for Local Government and Community Expansion

The greatest need for public land by local governments is for use as mineral material sources for construction and maintenance projects and for rights-of-way, sanitary landfills, and public recreation sites. Mineral materials sites are made available through material sales and free use permits, while right-of-way grants are issued for other uses.

At the present time there is one sanitary landfill site on public land near Pocatello. This site occupies 120 acres of public land and is expected to provide for future needs in this area. Any additional landfill sites would be accommodated by a sale or exchange under provisions of Section 203 or Section 206 of the FLPMA.

There does not appear to be any need for community expansion on the public land. This is due primarily to the small, slowly growing population, the large number of subdivided private lots around the cities in the PRA, and the depressed housing market.

Unauthorized Use

There are numerous parcels of public land that are being used without authorization. This unauthorized use is primarily dry land farming that has occurred unknowingly over a long period of time. In some cases, extensive development and improvement has occurred, while, in other cases, the use is minimal.

Other types of unauthorized use of public land include irrigation ditches, buildings, powerlines, telephone lines, roads, fences, and dumps. Some of these uses can be curtailed and removed, while others may be authorized as appropriate under permit or right-of-way grant. Lands with unauthorized uses can also be considered for disposal through sale or exchange.

RANGE MANAGEMENT

The PRA currently has 415 grazing allotments used by 315 livestock operators: 48 are Taylor Grazing Act Section 3 permittees and the remaining 267 are Taylor Grazing Act Section 15 lessees. The majority of the Section 3 allotments also contain State and/or private lands. Within the Section 3 allotments, the percent of Federal range varies from 10 percent to 100 percent, averaging approximately 80 percent.

Grazing permits and leases are authorized on 251,074 acres of public land with 182,008 acres administered as Section 3 licenses and 69,066 acres administered as Section 15 leases. There are also 2,861 acres of State Park land in the Indian Rocks State Park under a Recreation and Public Purposes Act (R&PP) patent I-017200 of April 25, 1968, reserving the grazing administration, including revenues generated, to the BLM.

There are 21,886 AUMs licensed for cattle, 7,035 AUMs for sheep, and 230 AUMs for horses. Approximately 3,506 AUMs are authorized for nonuse. (Figures vary from year to year.) A total of 32,657 AUMs have been allocated by both a 1963 range survey and the 1980 Bannock/Oneida EIS. There were 5,000 AUMs suspended from active preference through adjudication and the Bannock/Oneida EIS. These AUMs could become available if additional forage results from either range improvements or through the implementation of grazing management systems.

Currently, the following allotments have Allotment Management Plans (AMPs):

1. Inkom 5,511 acres
2. Bancroft 11,000 acres
3. Blackfoot River 317 acres

During 1977 and 1978, range condition was determined for the western portion of the PRA (Bannock/Oneida EIS area). The modified Soil Inventory Method (SIM) was the technique used. During 1984 and 1985 an Ecological Site Inventory (ESI) was conducted throughout the eastern portion of the PRA.

The Range Condition terminology used for the SIM method is tied more closely to a grazing point of view. The Ecological Condition reflects the results of comparing the existing plant community on a particular soil with the climax or Potential Natural Community (PNC) that should be on that site, barring man's influence. These two methods have differing nomenclature yet describe similar concepts. Table 3.3 illustrates this.

TABLE 3.3
RANGE CONDITION COMPARISON

ESI-Ecological Condition	SIM-Range Condition
Potential Natural Community	Excellent
Late Seral	Good
Mid Seral	Fair
Early Seral	Poor
Disturbed	Disturbed

The PNC is derived from natural environmental factors such as soils, topography, and climate, creating an environment best suited for that native plant community. It should not be assumed that late seral ecological condition is necessarily good condition for livestock

grazing. A plant community altered by burning, spraying, or mechanical treatment may rate out as early seral ecological condition, but may be good or even excellent condition for livestock grazing. The Bannock/Oneida EIS used only the good, fair, and poor condition classes. The ESI survey found only 764 acres, or 0.3 percent in PNC. For the entire PRA, the condition classes are as follows: 145,002 acres, or 68 percent in late seral; 59,518 acres, or 28 percent, mid seral; 4,446 acres, or 2 percent, early seral; and 2,645 acres, or 1 percent disturbed. The later figure, for the most part, represents agricultural trespass but could include gravel pits, unsuccessful seedings, weeds, mining, or other disturbances.

Generally, livestock can make use of level to moderately steep terrain, e.g., less than 50 percent slope. Previous Unit Resource Analysis data has shown about 10 percent of the PRA unsuitable for grazing. Approximately 50 percent of the PRA has slopes in excess of 30 percent. In terrain this steep, cattle will only graze the valleys and two or three hundred yards of the lower slopes. Sheep can be expected to utilize such slopes more fully, but they comprise only a fraction of the livestock grazing public land.

An Apparent Trend Inventory was conducted in conjunction with the ESI. Trend may be explained as the direction a plant community is heading in comparison to where it is now (Stoddart, Smith, 1975). If the plant community succession is towards the potential community or towards management objectives for the community, then the trend is upward. If there is no change in the plant community, then the trend is static. If the plant community succession is away from the potential community or management objectives for the community, then the trend is downward. The results of the apparent trend inventory is 20 percent upward, 76 percent static, and 4 percent downward.

Livestock grazing on BLM lands generally occurs between May 1 and November 30; however, some early spring and late fall use is authorized. Approximately 20 percent of the operations use the public land in the spring, then they move to either U.S. Forest Service lands or State lands in the summer, and then return to public land in the fall. The remaining 80 percent are Section 15 lessees. Section 15 lessees use public land in conjunction with their private lands under an approved season-of-use.

Currently, the PRA has four significant problems affecting range management:

1. Fragmented land pattern
2. Livestock concentrating on riparian areas
3. Poor livestock grazing distribution
4. Undesirable vegetation

Approximately 80 percent of the operators are Section 15 lessees. This involves 69,066 acres of public land. Since the majority of these lands

are used in conjunction with private lands and are extremely fragmented, effective grazing systems are extremely difficult to implement and maintain.

Excessive livestock utilization on riparian areas has existed ever since livestock was introduced on public land. The PRA has identified approximately 129.5 miles, or 777 acres, of riparian areas that receive heavy livestock grazing.

Poor livestock distribution occurs throughout most of the PRA to one degree or another. This results from the lack of watering areas, poor salt distribution, lack of fencing, and not enough BLM field inspections.

Musk thistle, Canada thistle, Dyer's woad, leafy spurge, and Knap-weed continue to spread throughout the PRA. There has been some control, however, not enough to make any real difference. Low larkspur and Foothill Deathcamas occur throughout the lower foothills and drainages. Some cattle loss has been attributed to low larkspur in Marsh Valley, 30 miles south of Pocatello, near the Wiregrass Reservoir area.

WILDLIFE, THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT

Terrestrial Wildlife Habitat

Wildlife habitat is composed principally of high quality native ranges. The types most commonly found are sagebrush/grass 65 percent, mountain brush 10 percent, aspen 4 percent, Douglas-fir 7 percent, juniper/mountain mahogany 9 percent, maple 4 percent, with marshlands and riparian areas making up the remaining 1 percent.

Wildlife species diversity is high as a result of the diversity of habitat types and the abundance of water. Because of limited space, only major species will be addressed in this document. Management direction for sensitive species will be consistent with the BLM's Sensitive Species Management direction (BLM/IDF&G MOU 1986).

Wildlife habitat condition was rated satisfactory or unsatisfactory based on the habitat requirements needed by the species to maintain and produce a viable population. Ecological condition as determined by the range inventory was the primary factor in delineating satisfactory and unsatisfactory habitats. Other things considered were:

- Age and form class of key browse species.
- Presence or absence of key vegetation classes and their condition in riparian communities.
- Apparent forage diversity.

Wildlife numbers for big game species were taken from the Idaho Fish and Game Department's five-year plans for elk and deer. These plans call for

an increase of 500 deer and 305 elk in the herd units covered in this RMP. Wildlife AUMs have not been calculated or allocated in this plan. For the purposes of comparison, 1 cattle equivalent AUM equals 6 deer AUMs or 2 elk AUMs. The amount of time spent by these animals on the winter range is figured at 5.5 months to cover periods of winter conditions at all altitudes where winter range is found.

Rocky Mountain Elk

Winter forage is the most important critical habitat component for approximately 500 elk dependant on public land for part or all of their winter food requirements.

Elk calving and summer ranges include Browns Canyon, Slug Creek, Schmid Ridge, Oneida Narrows, and Garden Gap. These are mostly mature stands of aspen and Douglas-fir with brushy understories and small clearings. They are currently in satisfactory condition and should remain so for some time.

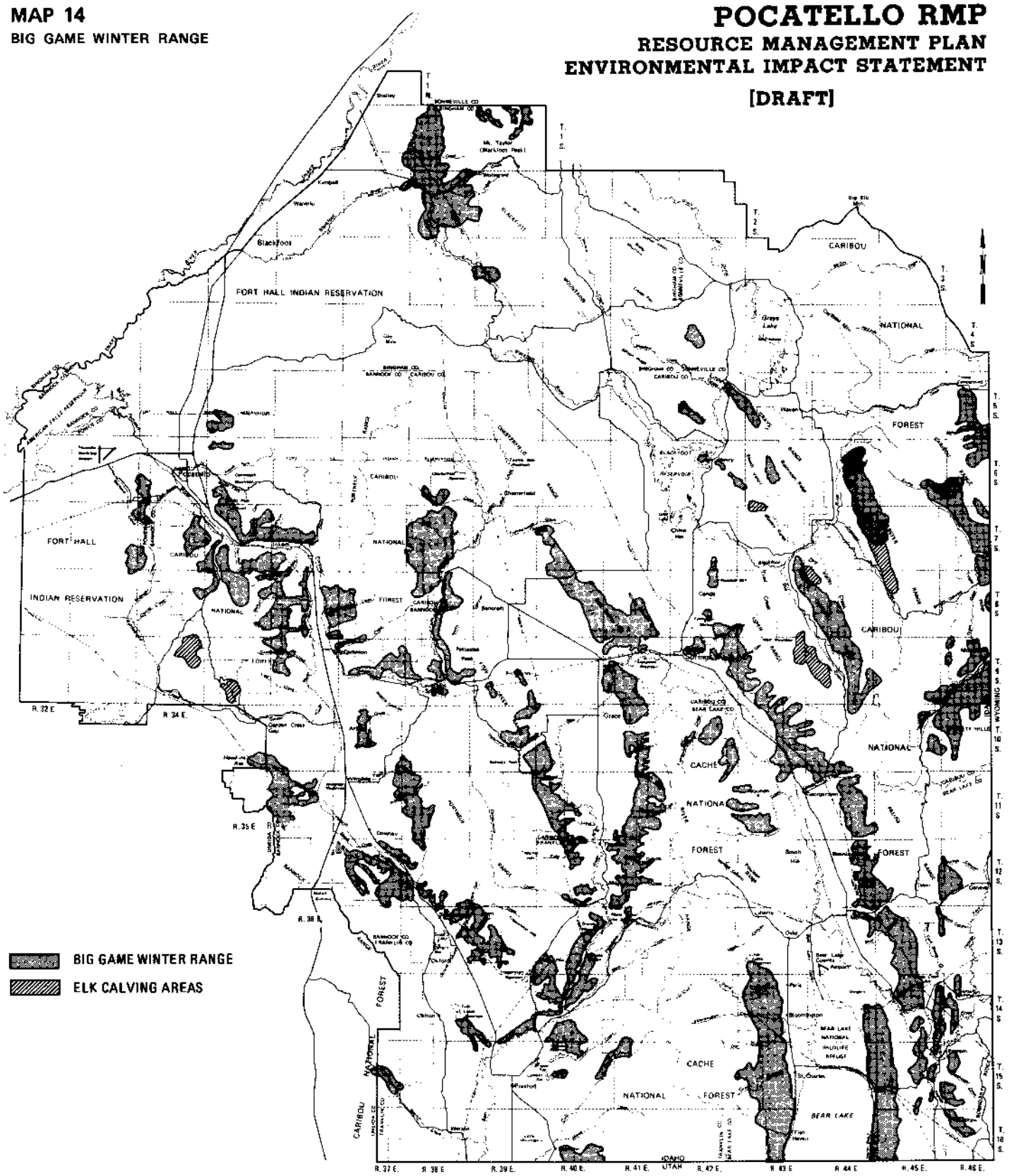
According to Kuck (1984), natural succession of aspen to conifer types is probably the major cause of habitat loss for elk and deer. The Caribou National Forest has an aspen management program designed to set back succession of aspen stands. While the BLM administers in excess of 11,000 acres of aspen in deer and elk use areas, most of it is in stands too small to manage for any significant results. However, coordination with the adjacent Forest Service aspen management areas will be done whenever possible.

Of a total of 450,000 acres of big game winter range in the PRA, only 20 percent or 88,618, are BLM-administered. Approximately 18,800 of these acres are occupied by elk during the winter; 98 percent are in satisfactory condition. Winter ranges are often located near livestock feeding operations, and, once the elk find haystacks associated with these operations, depredation problems result. There are problems in four areas: Williams Creek, Stump Creek Ridge, Geneva Summit, and near Goshen. While most of the adjacent public land are in satisfactory condition, the foraging is easier at haystacks and the elk have little incentive to stay on the native range. Trapping operations have been run by the Idaho Fish and Game Department at Williams Creek and Stump Creek Ridge the last couple of years to capture and remove offending animals.

Two complete HMPs are directed at elk and their habitat - Stump Creek HMP and Schmid Ridge HMP. They call for monitoring and increased supervision to reduce late fall grazing which occurs to the detriment of the bitterbrush. They both need updating upon completion of this RMP.

MAP 14
BIG GAME WINTER RANGE

POCATELLO RMP
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
[DRAFT]



Mule Deer

The PRA contains all or part of 12 Fish and Game herd units. Two units, 66 and 66A, do not have wintering deer on public land within the PRA boundary. The remaining units support about 47,100 deer, about 6,748 of which spend all or part of the winter on public land.

The situation is much the same as it is with elk. The summer habitat is good but winter range is in shorter supply. Overall winter range condition is 92 percent satisfactory with a few localized exceptions. Two HMPs are in effect to improve deer habitat - the Fish Haven and the Soda Hills. They both call for increased monitoring and possible changes in livestock season of use to improve deer habitat.

Probably the biggest handicap to habitat management in the PRA is the scattered nature of the public land. Of a total 450,285 acres of winter range inventoried, only 20 percent, or 88,618 acres, are BLM-administered. Of these public lands, 92 percent are in satisfactory condition. There are not a lot of opportunities to improve big game habitat on public land by reasonable economical means. Specific habitat improvements will be addressed in AMPs and HMPs in conjunction with grazing systems and plans for other resources.

Moose

Unlike deer and elk, moose in this part of the State do not have the typical summer range and winter range separation. Most moose in the PRA are found in home ranges which they use on a year-round basis. With their long legs, they are not restricted by snow depths as much as deer and elk. They are scattered throughout the PRA, but few are found on public land with any regularity. Therefore, they are not addressed in detail in this plan.

Upland Game Birds

The upland bird species found in the PRA are sage grouse, sharp-tailed grouse, blue grouse, ruffed grouse, ring-necked pheasant, Hungarian partridge, and chukar.

Sage grouse is the most widespread and the heaviest hunted species. The best sage grouse population in this area is found on the Bear Lake Plateau. Approximately 70,000 acres of sage grouse habitat are found in the PRA, with 89 percent in satisfactory condition. Possible habitat manipulation would include burning some sagebrush stands which are becoming decadent and of limited value to grouse. However, some of the same stands are a winter mainstay for deer wintering in the same area. Close cooperative efforts with the Idaho Fish and Game Department will be needed to determine the locations of any habitat improvements for sage grouse. Some fencing or improved management of riparian areas or wet meadows will improve sage grouse brood rearing areas.

The Columbian sharp-tailed grouse is a species once found widely distributed throughout the Great Basin. The bird is dependent on native ranges; however, the ranges have been reduced over the years due to farming, grazing, and fire prevention practices. Sharp-taileds are a sensitive State species although they are present in huntable populations in this part of the State. About 30,000 acres of sharp-tailed habitat are found primarily in the Pocatello, Goshen, and the Grays Lake Outlet/Willow Creek areas. Eighty-eight percent of this acreage is in good condition. Current populations have limited possibilities for increasing under existing conditions. A research project on sharp-tailed grouse in the Boise area may provide information which would help direct future management decisions.

Ring-necked pheasant and Hungarian partridge are found mostly in association with agricultural areas. Public land in this PRA supports so few that they are not addressed specifically in this RMP. Like chukars, which are also widely scattered, they will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis in AMPs or HMPs.

Waterfowl

Waterfowl habitat varies from major river systems to scattered stock ponds and marshes. Improved riparian areas along the Blackfoot and Bear rivers would enhance waterfowl production. Placement of goose nesting platforms would boost production by one to four geese/nest/year.

Threatened, Endangered or Sensitive Species

Three wildlife species are endangered under the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (50 CFR 402, 43 CFR 870) occur in the PRA. Three sensitive plants are also found in the PRA.

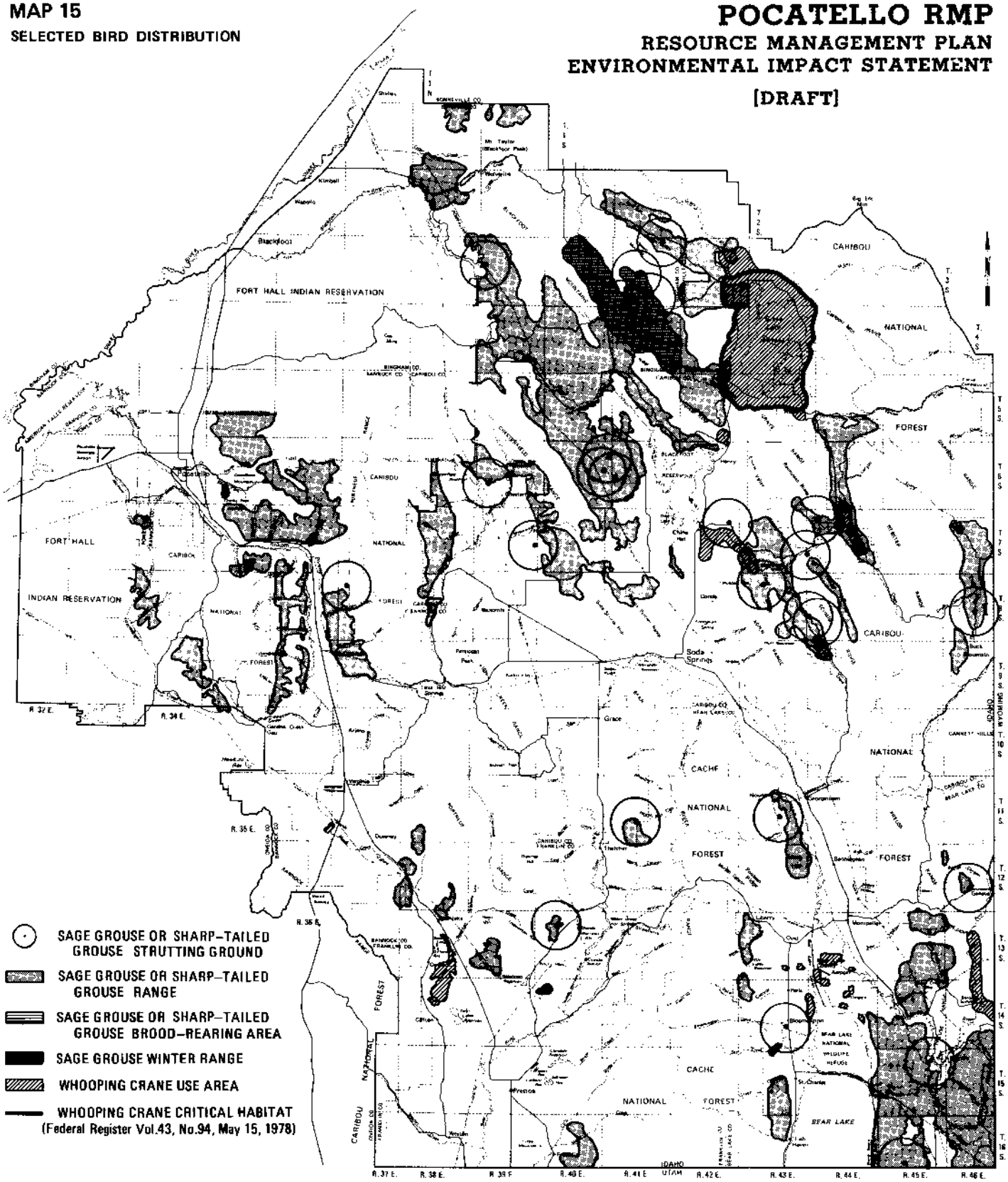
Bald Eagle

Wintering populations in Idaho range between 400 and 756 birds, based on the midwinter survey sponsored by the National Wildlife Federation. Between 50 and 125 of these birds winter in the PRA along the major river drainages and big game winter ranges. No nesting, current or historical, occurs on public land. There are also no known night roosts on public land.

Public land having regular daytime perches and those areas where nesting or night roosting may occurs in the future, will be managed to protect and enhance the habitat attractive to the birds.

MAP 15
SELECTED BIRD DISTRIBUTION

POCATELLO RMP
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
[DRAFT]



Peregrine Falcon

The endangered peregrine falcon is found in the PRA during spring and fall migrations. There are no active nest sites in the PRA, although the bird nested historically near Grays Lake and Red Rock Pass. There are no plans for re-introductions in the near future. If any should be introduced to the area, management of public land will be directed toward supplying a stable prey base.

Whooping Crane

The Whooping Crane Foster Parent Program at Grays Lake National Wildlife Refuge has created a situation where the endangered whooping cranes are now frequenting traditional sandhill crane areas. Locations they have used are shown on Map 15. Although they very rarely use public land, small acreages in the proximity of whooping or sandhill crane habitat will be managed appropriately.

There is one 40-acre parcel within the Grays Lake Refuge boundary currently under cooperative agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for management as whooping crane habitat. Two other 40-acre tracts will be considered for a similar agreement during the RMP. There are 894 acres of public land within the whooping crane critical habitat designation published in the Federal Register of May 15, 1978.

Fisheries

There are no fish species of special concern identified by the Idaho Fish and Game Department in streams on public lands in the PRA. Primary game fish species are cutthroat, rainbow, and brook trout.

Of the 97.44 miles of stream inventoried, 51.82 miles are contain game fish. These fisheries will improve with a subsequent improvement in the condition of riparian habitat.

The Blackfoot River is a good fisheries for cutthroat and rainbow trout. However, operation of the Blackfoot River Dam by the Bureau of Indian Affairs during the non-irrigation season limits flows on the River to about 30cfs. This significantly limits game fish habitat. Dam releases for irrigation result in high flows which makes it very difficult to successfully fish the River. The impact of dam operation on the fishery is revealed by the Idaho Fish and Game Department stream classification survey. The Department rates the portion of the Blackfoot River above the reservoir as a Class I stream (the highest rating possible), while the sections below the dam have Class II and Class IV ratings. The River fishery would be considerably improved by maintaining a an increased minimum flow in the winter and a reduced maximum flows in summer.

The Bear River has a marginal fishery containing mainly carp and suckers.